

March 14, 2023

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee.

I offer written testimony today in support of House Bill 6884. This bill takes important steps toward addressing the educator shortage in Connecticut and will significantly impact how current and future educators view our state legislature regarding the value it puts on the voices of educators in the field. As an Early Childhood Educator in the classroom for 25 years, an Education Consultant in the Talent Office at the CSDE for nearly 15 years, and current Special Projects Coordinator, contributing to the education portfolio for U.S. Representative Jahana Hayes, I have been witness to education policy decisions that do not reflect the best interests of students **because** they neglected to consider the expertise offered by proven leaders in the classroom. The undeniable fact is that good teachers raise student achievement. Although there are countless, prestigious research institutions that can be cited in agreement, our individual education experiences often serve as the barometer by which we make judgements and draw conclusions. We all can attribute some of our personal and professional success to the relationship forged and guidance received from at least one prominent teacher in our lives. Here in Connecticut, you have access to hundreds of teachers that made an indelible difference on the lives of so many. Today, I specifically wish to address two provisions in HB 6844 that speak to: 1) adding non-voting members to the State Board of Education and 2) requiring the Commissioner of Education to establish a teacher advisory committee from the pool of Connecticut Teachers of the Year.

During my years at the CSDE, I had the fortune of coordinating the Connecticut Teacher of the Year (CTOY) Program in partnership with the Connecticut Teacher of the Year Council. The process by which the CTOY is selected is rigorous, fair, increasingly more inclusive of diverse cultures, backgrounds, and learning environments, and intentionally focused on finding an educator confident in the active role of advocacy. Educators are interviewed by a panel of individuals representing higher education, business leaders, the State Board of Education, teachers' unions, superintendents and principal's associations, parent groups, and CTOY Council members inclusive of previous CTOYs, semifinalists and finalists. Once a final Connecticut Teacher of the Year is selected, there is no question that this individual has demonstrated expertise in their field, has a proven performance record, and is an integral member of the larger school community. These teachers see challenges as opportunities to problem solve. They know that the best solutions come from diverse perspectives. They are listeners who seek to understand yet recognize the necessity of final decisions. Compromise and consensual agreement are not lost on this group of esteemed educators.

As you consider all the provisions of HB 6884, please recognize the level of expertise you have in the educators who proudly serve in Connecticut's public schools to assist in development and implementation of policy. As an Emeritus member of the Connecticut Teacher of the Year Council, I continue to admire these educators who are still standing strong, despite the unprecedented challenges of a global health crisis. As we enter this post-pandemic era, they are keenly aware of the fallout from three interrupted school years and the massive impact it has had on academic performance, but even more importantly, the significant impact on students' and educators' mental health and wellbeing. They are ready to share their wisdom and their experiences with state leaders in positions of power to initiate change. Please utilize the enormous resource of Connecticut Teachers of the Year to advise and support you as we approach, what has to be, a new framework for student success. We need to attract and retain intelligent and innovative educators, but we need those who have already earned that badge of honor to share their truths with honest and hopeful testimony. Invite these educators to the table and be prepared to listen. Then, work alongside them to re-create safe learning environments where families can trust their school leaders and students can recover and thrive.

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